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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a project designed to improve student achievement through better communication between parents/guardians and teachers of 9th-grade science students in a large, north-central Illinois urban community. Analysis of probable-cause data revealed that no structured means of communication existed. Attempts to communicate were thwarted by students not taking written materials home, the absence of phones in the home, and the problem of non-English-speaking parents/guardians. Improvement strategies fell into five process objectives: (1) initiate contact to establish methods of communication; (2) establish a format for consistent communication; (3) establish verification procedures to ensure contacts are made; (4) produce student/teacher co-evaluation; and (5) encourage parent/student discussion of evaluation. The intervention did not manifest improvement for the class as a whole, either academically or behaviorally. On an individual basis, however, when parents became actively involved in the process and followed through on remedies, improvement was attained. Appendixes contain study questionnaires and forms. (Contains 34 references.) (Author/GLR)

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HOME - SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

[Ninth Grade]

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by

Bruce H. Moe

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Site: Rockford, IL
Submitted: April, 1994

Bruce H. Moe
Guilford High School
Rockford, IL

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

This Action Research was approved by

Priscilla Hartwig Ed. D., **SXU Facilitator**

Sue Koch, **IRI/Skylight Facilitator**

Dean, School of Education

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Bruce H. Moe **SITE:** Rockford I
DATE: April 1994

TITLE: Home - School Communication

ABSTRACT: This project is designed to improve student achievement through better communication between parents/ guardians and teachers of ninth grade science students in a large urban community, located in north central Illinois. The problem was originally noted through teacher discussion of personal observations and was confirmed by a parent questionnaire.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that no structured means of communication exists. Attempts to communicate are thwarted by students not taking written materials home, the absence of phones in the home, and the problem of non-English speaking parents/guardians.

Improvement strategies fall into five process objectives: 1) initiate contact to establish methods of communication, 2) establish a format for consistent communication, 3) establish verification procedures to ensure contacts are made, 4) produce student/teacher co-evaluation, 5) encourage parent/student discussion of evaluation.

The intervention did not manifest improvement for the class as a whole, either academically or behaviorally. On an individual basis, where parents became actively involved in the process and followed through on remedies, improvement was attained.

Chapter 1

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND DESCRIPTION OF SETTING

Problem Statement

One of the problems impacting student achievement in third period freshman science was the lack of quantitative and qualitative communication between the home and school. The problem was first evidenced by a parent questionnaire and through teacher discussion. The lack of a structured means of home-school communication limited the exchange of information which hindered the cooperative effort of parents and teacher to aid student achievement.

Description of Immediate Problem Setting

The high school was an inner-city school of just under one thousand seven hundred students located in north central Illinois. The school contained ninth through twelfth grades with students ranging in age from thirteen to nineteen. The school was located in one of the more affluent areas of the city. However, due to the bussing of students to achieve racial balance, many of the students came from low income areas including housing projects. There was a special program within the school for non-English speaking students, especially Vietnamese.

The high school was in the process of implementing new curricula to comply with a desegregation court order. These

changes included both revision of existing classes as well as the addition of "tutorial" classes for those students who needed or wanted help in math, science or English. Average class size was 20.9 students during the 1991-1992 school year, but has increased since. The average for the researcher's non-tutorial classes was 29.

The racial/ethnic background of the students was: White 74.5 percent, Black 18.7 percent, Hispanic 2.4 percent, Asian/Pacific Islander 4.3 percent, Native American 0.1 percent. Low income students (defined as those from families receiving public aid, living in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, being supported in foster homes with public funds or eligible to receive free or reduced-priced lunches) represented 10.1 percent of the student population. Limited-English-Proficient students (those tested and found eligible for bilingual education) represented 4.8 percent of the student population.

The attendance rate for the high school was 90.9 percent. The portion of students entering or leaving the school during the school year was 23.4 percent. The number of chronic truants (those who were absent without valid cause for 10 percent or more of the last 180 school days) was 119.

The percent of students enrolled in college preparatory classes was 69.2 percent. Those enrolled in general education classes made up 20.1 percent and those enrolled in vocational training were 10.7 percent. The graduation rate

for the high school was 90.9 percent (after adjusting for students transferring in and out during the year).

The faculty at the school was in transition. Due to incentives for early retirement, the school had approximately one third of its staff new to the building for the 1993-1994 school year, as well as a new principal, new assistant principal and several new counselors.

The Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) test was given to all eleventh grade students. Only scores for those students who took all parts of the test are counted. IGAP scoring was based on the premise that 25 percent of the students' scores would fall into each of the four quartiles. The test was administered to 433 of the high school's students. Table 1 represents the results of the IGAP test.

Table 1

Illinois Goal Assessment Program
Results for Eleventh Grade
1992
(Percent)

Reading				Mathematics			
Top Qtr	3rd Qtr	2nd Qtr	1st Qtr	Top Qtr	3rd Qtr	2nd Qtr	1st Qtr
35	26	20	19	39	17	20	24

Science			
Top Qtr	3rd Qtr	2nd Qtr	1st Qtr
40	28	21	11

An analysis of the data indicated that at the eleventh grade level more than 50 percent of the students fell into the top two quartiles in all areas. In science, 68 percent of the students were in the top two quartiles.

The Iowa Test of Basic Skills was also administered to the same students under virtually the same conditions. The results of the Iowa Test are listed in table 2.

Table 2

Iowa Test of Basic Skills Form J
Results for Eleventh Grade
1992
(Percent)

Reading Comprehension					Mathematics				
Top Qtr	3rd Qtr	2nd Qtr	1st Qtr	% Tested	Top Qtr	3rd Qtr	2nd Qtr	1st Qtr	% Tested
29	34	22	14	88.1	34	24	21	21	88.8
Science					Social Studies				
Top Qtr	3rd Qtr	2nd Qtr	1st Qtr	% Tested	Top Qtr	3rd Qtr	2nd Qtr	1st Qtr	% Tested
36	23	22	19	87.3	33	29	20	17	86.3

An analysis of the data from the Iowa test indicated that more than 58 percent of the students fell into the top two quartiles in all areas. In science, 59 percent of the students were in the top two quartiles.

The high school was built in the 1960's with traditional classrooms. The library was somewhat small, but an up-to-date, well stocked, modern facility. There was also a computer lab in the building which was being developed for

use by teachers in every department. The school had four administrators - a principal, two assistant principals and an assistant principal in charge of minority affairs. There were six counselors, a full time nurse and usually two off-duty police officers serving as liaisons to assist in handling disturbances.

The Community

The city is located in north central Illinois approximately 100 miles northwest of Chicago and covers 50 square miles. At the time of the study, there was a racially diverse population of 139,426. The unemployment rate for the area fluctuated at approximately 7.5 percent. Median household income was $28,282.

According to the 1990 census figures the community had 11.2 percent single parent households with school age children. This represented both male and female heads-of-households. Of persons over 18 years of age, 25.7 percent had not received a high school diploma, 22.4 percent had a post high school degree.

At one time the city was a leader in the machine tool industry, but many companies had been leaving the area. As in other cities, there had been a decline in the vitality of the downtown area with many of the commercial stores moving to area shopping malls.

A river divides the city into east and west, although in recent years there had been a major attempt to ignore this physical landmark. A central high school was abandoned

in the early 1940's in favor of two separate high schools, east and west, creating an east side - west side perception. Recent growth of the city had been to the east for both business and housing. This growth had caused a "have/have-not" situation in the school district. The newer east side schools had benefitted from newer more affluent home environments that subsequently resulted in more substantial personal contributions made to neighborhood schools.

In the late 1980's a decision was made to close the west high school and reassign those students. This resulted in other school closings and redistricting. A group of parents formed a coalition and filed a lawsuit charging discrimination in how the closings were handled. The racial make up of the students most involved added to the perception of discriminatory practices. The lawsuit served as a springboard to include all manner of racial, social, and ethnic discrimination within the community concerning education. Many changes had been made in the school district to serve the educational needs of minority groups. Many of these changes had been ordered by the court (without regard to cost), even though the school district had not been found guilty of discrimination. And the cost had been significant. The district was on the verge of bankruptcy and had been ordered by the court to levy taxes to cover the cost of the lawsuit changes.

The local newspaper had covered details of the lawsuit and its cost to the taxpayers many times. The tax increases

already generated by the law suit were largely responsible for the overwhelming defeat of a referendum in a recent election. Through interviews and "letters-to-the-editor," the citizenry expressed a very negative view of the educational process.

Regional and National Significance

Journals such as the **NASSP Bulletin** (National Association for Secondary School Principals) (Stouffer, 1992) and **Education and Urban Society** (Epstein, 1987) have advocated better communication between the school and parent/ community. Both these publications have had an influence on the proliferation of the "parent-teacher conference." Until recently, however, these conferences had been limited to the elementary grades. With the adoption of the middle school concept, there had been an extension of the practice into the middle school. Parent-teacher conferences had done much to improve communication between the school and parent, but conferences were not enough. "Teachers need to stay in constant contact with the home by personal (not form) letters requiring a response and by telephone." (Simmons, 1990, p. 224).

Acknowledgment of the problem extends beyond the confines of the academic citadel. Popular magazines - **Redbook** (Billingsley, 1991), **McCall's** (Manske, 1992), **Better Homes and Gardens** ("Five Toughest Parent-School Conflicts," 1985), **Ladies' Home Journal** ("Parent-Teacher Conferences," 1983), **Good Housekeeping** (Cenedella, 1989)

and **Parents** (Costello, 1986; LeShan, 1990; Segal, 1986) - carried various articles on improving communication between schools and the home. In "School: the Parent Factor," Senator Bill Bradley pointed out, "...schools should reach out to parents, show them how to extend and enrich classroom lessons..." (1988, p. 112). News magazines - **Newsweek, Nation's Business,** and **U.S. News & World Report** - wrote about the necessity of schools providing the parent with as much on-going information as possible. "Where are the parents?" asked McCormick. "Fathers and mothers blame everyone but themselves for Johnny's tepid academic performance" (1990, p. 55). The author pointed to improved parent-teacher relationships as a key to improving student performance. Professional journals - **Phi Delta Kappan** (Henderson, 1988; Walberg, 1984), **Education Digest** (Nelson, 1988), **Childhood Education** (Gelfer, 1991), and **Teaching K-8** (Canter, 1989), **Instructor** (Fredricks & Harrington, 1983) - also stressed the importance of making the parent part of the educational process.

The articles in these magazines and journals concentrated on the effects of communicating with parents within the conference setting (Ciscell, 1990; Costello, 1986; Epstein, 1987; Fredericks, 1983; Simmons, 1990). They also mention the importance of frequent newsletters to keep parents up-to-date and informed on what is happening in their schools (Costa, 1991; Dornbusch and Ritter, 1988; Gelfer, 1991; Nelson, 1988; Stouffer, 1992).

Improving Communication between Parents and Teachers of Middle School Age Students by the Use of the Telephone and Other Techniques, a doctoral dissertation by William E. Cottle (1991), and **Improving Parent Involvement through More Effective School-Home Communications,** a paper delivered by Richard F. Purnell and Edward E. Gotts (1983) at the meeting of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, both dealt more with "how" than "what" information is communicated. Purnell and Gotts sought to measure communication between the school and home, while Cottle sought to improve it. Purnell and Gotts found parents were receptive to information in newsletters and personal notification that their student was in need of assistance. Cottle instituted a telephone communication system which was well-received and led to an increase in homework completion.

Chapter 2

PROBLEM EVIDENCE AND PROBABLE CAUSE

Problem Background

As stated in Chapter One, there was greater need for communication between the home and school. Research by Cattermole and Robinson (1985) ranked children first as both their parents' most frequent and preferred source of information about a school. Children were not seen as the most effective method of communication, however. Their research indicated the direct approach (phone or personal contact) ranked number one with nearly ninety per cent of the parents returning surveys. The method of communication was one area that needed to be improved in our school situation. Students had been shown not to be a reliable intermediary between the home and school. Direct communication between the parent (parent will indicate both parent and guardian) and teacher became requisite.

In the 1992-1993 school year middle schools in the district initiated parent/teacher conferences. Each team was encouraged to meet with as many parents as possible within the time constraints of the school day. Response from both teachers and parents was encouraging. The program was extended the following year was to encourage parents and any other interested parties to visit classrooms.

Problem Evidence

One way that secondary teachers attempted to keep parents informed of academic performance was the progress report, distributed to students during the fifth week of each nine week quarter. At the high school, progress reports were mailed directly home by the district. The researcher did not receive one response from any parent. By the time the follow-up contacts were made, it was often too late for any remedial measures to affect the current grading period.

A parent questionnaire distributed in mid-May asked parents if they had been contacted by the school (positively or negatively), by whom specifically, whether they were satisfied with the contact, the methods used for those contacts, and what involvement the parent had with the school. The purpose was to: 1) to find just how many would be returned, and 2) to get an indication of how much the parents were involved with their schools.

The parent questionnaire distributed in the district's four middle schools resulted in a return of approximately 9 percent (see Appendix A). Many teachers offered students points toward their grades or other incentives and the return was still very low. The researcher was unable to determine if the low return was the result of surveys not taken home or parents' lack of interest.

The low return makes definitive conclusions impossible. Eighty-two percent of those who did respond felt that

contacts with the school were beneficial. For personal contact the most preferred and most often used method was the telephone. Seventy-five percent of those who answered the survey indicated that the telephone was the method they preferred when contacted by the school.

Probable Causes

Returns from the survey and comments from teachers about the survey indicated that the low returns resulted from some common problems with all information meant for the home. Many students did not take any materials home, a number of the students did not have telephones, and another segment did not have parents that spoke or read English. Another contributing cause of the problem was that the parent often did not know what or when material, such as progress reports, were to be sent home. The absence of an initial parent contact informing them of what to expect and when to expect it meant that parents were unaware that the information was sent or even available. Therefore parents did not question the student or teachers as to the whereabouts of that information.

In a survey of high school parents, Purnell and Gotts (1983) found that although over two-thirds of the parents attended extra-curricular activities (particularly athletic events) an even greater proportion did not attend parent meetings or parent advisory council meetings. In the researcher's experience, participation of secondary parents in local PTO's was extremely limited. At both middle and

high school levels, lack of parent interest along with lack of student interest were ranked relatively high in intensity for both parents and teachers (Goodlad, 1984).

Finding time to communicate with parents was a real issue for teachers who already struggle with numerous other responsibilities. The workload of teachers discourages them from actively working with parents (Epstein and Becker, 1982; Rasinski and Fredericks, 1989). A key to improving communication, as described by Vandegrift and Greene, was "meeting parents where they are" (1992, p. 57). The Arizona At-Risk Pilot Project (1988) suggested the most effective means of involving parents was to establish personal rapport and not initially require high levels of commitment. "Something as simple as a friendly conversation with the classroom teacher can go a long way toward building parental support" (p. 59). Effective Schooling Practices would ensure "frequent two-way communication with parents" (Pochowski, 1992).

Public perception of parental responsibilities as indicated in a recent Gallup Poll of public attitudes toward public schools found 96% of respondents believed it is very important to encourage parents to take an active role in the education of their children (Elam, Rose, and Gallup, 1993) Research on Effective Schools both parochially (Epstein, 1987) and nationally (Reisner and Haslam, 1992) point to parental involvement as one of 10 key issues. In Chicago's "Schoolwatch" program, parental involvement was one of four

factors in effective schools that should improve student achievement (Hawley and Rosenholtz cited in Epstein, 1987). One finding of "What Works: Research about teaching and learning" (cited in Pochowski, 1992) concluded "parental involvement helps children learn more effectively. Teachers who are successful at involving parents in their children's schoolwork are successful because they work at it" (p. 9). A subsequent study found "students whose teachers frequently used parent involvement made greater gains in reading achievement (but not in math achievement) than did other students from fall to spring" (Epstein, 1987, p. 128).

Cottle (1991) cites a study by Thompson which sheds some light on the reasons for strained home-school relations after elementary school:

> Thompson's 1981 study suggested that students entering the seventh grade displayed a sudden increase in "alienated behavior" (p. 8). This changed behavior was attributed to the structure of the secondary school which promoted a social climate inclined to discourage home-school relations. According to Thompson (1981), this division between home and school contributed to "deteriorating parent-child communication patterns" (p. 9), which promoted undesirable adolescent behaviors. The importance of mitigating against this split between the home and the school which occurred at this time of transition was clearly implied by this research. (p. 24)

Lamm (1986) suggested that one reason that parents of average and lower level students may be less apt to involve themselves with teachers and the schools in the education of their children relates to American attitudes toward academic achievement. He said that many American parents believe that innate ability is a more important determinant of academic success than is the amount of effort put forth by the student. This belief could encourage apathy on the part of both parents and teachers. If parents believe that the student is not of superior ability, then communication and cooperation to promote maximum effort from the student is of little consequence. According to Lamm, parents must become more involved in schools and in encouraging their children to work hard to learn at home if these children are to reach their full potential.

Chapter 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Research and Review of the Literature

The researcher used the descriptor "Home-School Communication" to narrow the search of the literature. The information the researcher was seeking was in the area of how an ongoing dialogue between the teacher and the parent could be established and maintained.

There were nearly 700 source dealing with parent-teacher conferences and the direct involvement of parents in the school, mostly for pre-school and elementary levels. The preponderance of the literature was on how to conduct a conference, but little was has been written about ongoing communication. The researcher looked for information specifically on how to establish contact with parents and how to keep the lines of communication open and productive.

Cattermole and Robinson (1985) pointed out that, with the large number of districts working to establish communication links between the home and school, "one might logically suppose that these steps are firmly grounded in research... In fact, surprisingly little research has been done on the topic of home/school communication" (p. 48).

Cottle (1991) citing Epstein (1987), Weidman and LeMahleu (1985) and Stevenson and Baker (1987) concluded, "some published findings suggest that the problem of poor

parent-teacher communication is significant" (p. 22). A survey of teachers, parents, and students in the San Francisco Bay area by Dornbusch and Ritter (1986) suggested that parent-teacher communication may be even worse at the high school level. In their survey of over 300 high school teachers, over half reported only a little contact with parents regardless of the different types of students. Stevenson and Baker (1987), using a national sample, found declining parental involvement in educational activities as their children grew older, particularly for boys. Weldman and LeMahleu found "a surprising lack of parental involvement in schoolwork. . .at the middle school level among the most highly educated parents" (Cottle, 1991, p. 23).

A recurring theme in the literature was the necessity of involving parents in the educational process. Avoiding an adversarial position was important in keeping parents involved. "Educators must not assume that socioeconomically poor parents are poor parents. The school must work with parents from an empowerment rather than a deficit model of parent involvement" (Stouffer, 1992, p. 7). "Even those teachers who did not consciously try to discourage parents from working with them may have been seen by parents as authority figures and therefore unapproachable" (Cottle, 1991, p. 21).

Project Objectives

The first terminal objective of parent-teacher intervention was related to academic performance in the classroom

as measured by quantitative and qualitative improvement in communication between the home and school. Therefore:

> As a result of improved parental contact during the second quarter of the first semester of the 1993-1994 school year, the third period freshman science students will improve their second quarter average grade five tenths of a point as compared to their first quarter average grade. Concomitantly there will be a rise in the percentage of assignments turned in.

Academic achievement was directly related to both the personal conduct of the student as well as the circumjacence of the classroom. Parental involvement to monitor student behavior was essential to achieve the first objective. Therefore the second terminal objective was:

> As a result of improved parental contact during the second quarter of the 1993-1994 school year, the third period freshman science students' behavior will improve as measured by observation check list and discipline referrals.

In order to accomplish the terminal objectives, the following process objectives defined the parameters for problem resolution.

> 1) In order to improve parental contact, during the latter portion of the first quarter of school, 100 percent of parents were contacted about methods and frequency of communication.
>
> 2) In order to maintain a high level of communication, 100 percent of parents were contacted once every two weeks by phone or in writing to inform them of student academic and behavioral progress.
>
> 3) In order to ensure 100 percent contact, a phone log was maintained and signature confirmation for all written documents was established.
>
> 4) In order to maintain the focus on academic and behavioral achievement, students, parents and teachers co-authored bi-weekly evaluations which were signed by all parties.

Project Solution Components

The major element was to establish and maintain open communication throughout the education triangle (parent, student and teacher). The first component of the strategy was to establish expectations with input from each of the three sides. It was imperative that everyone understood how and when communication was to take place and their respective role in that communication. Each member, through their participation, increased their awareness of and responsibility to the triangle. The parent became a utilitarian team member rather than an uninformed outsider. It was anticipated that student motivation would increase due to their awareness of the frequency and quality of parent feedback.

Chapter 4

ACTION PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Description for Implementing the Solution Strategy

The action plan was designed to address three major solution components: designing a communication format to be informative and timely, involving parents and students in understanding evaluations, and involving parents, students and the teacher in addressing problem areas.

The parent-teacher communication method was to be established by the end of the first quarter through discussion and consensus of parents and teachers. Parent choices were: student delivered, teacher mailed, or direct phone contact. (Appendix B)

Students wrote self-evaluations which were discussed and edited with the teacher. Parents were encouraged to review the reports with the students as they were received. The evaluation forms were designed to stimulate discussion of all areas of the students' performance in class. Stem statements were provided to encourage discussion of positive areas of the students' performance which had too often been neglected in parent-teacher communication. Stem statements were also provided to direct the students into metacognitive thought focused on improving their performance. The purpose of this component was to demonstrate to parents and students

how the students' activities and attitudes related to achieving their academic goals. (Appendix C)

The researcher also provided both parents and students with suggestions to optimize the effectiveness of the evaluation. Strategies to solve problem areas were evolved from teacher, student and parent input based on the content of the evaluation.

The implementation plan is described below in outline form.

I. Initial Contacts

- A. Who: Classroom teacher
- B. What: Contact 100 percent of parents of students
- C. When: During the latter portion of the first quarter
- D. How: Letters, phone, or in person as needed
- E. Where: The researcher's school - Guilford
- F. Why: To inform parents of the researcher's plan and establish a format for future communication

II. Continuing Communications

- A. Who: Teacher, student and parents
- B. What: The evaluation form for each student
- C. When: Bi-weekly
- D. How: As per method agreed upon with parent
- E. Why: To insure that parents, students and teacher were all informed and active in effectuating problem solving strategies as well as encouraging positive behaviors.

Method of Assessment

Academic assessment was a comparison of average grade (using a four point system) for the 33 students in third period science between first and second quarter of the 1993-1994 school year. Also, there was a comparison of the percentage of assignments turned in for the two quarters. Behavioral patterns were monitored through observation check lists, the number of discipline referrals and anecdotal comments from parents, teachers and students. (Appendix D)

Chapter 5

Evaluation of Results and Process

Implementation History

The terminal objectives of the intervention addressed the impact of improving the quantity and quality of communication between the home and school on grades, homework, and behavior. The background for concern was generally through conversations with teachers at all levels in informal gatherings. A review of the literature reinforced the concern that parents were often not kept up to date on their student's performance in the classroom. Therefore, the terminal objectives stated:

> As a result of improved parental contact during the second quarter of the first semester of the 1993-1994 school year, the third period freshman science class will improve their second quarter grade five tenths of a point as compared with their first quarter grade average. Concomitantly, there will be a decrease in the percentage of missing assignments.
>
> As a result of improved parental contact during the second quarter of the first semester of the 1993-1994 school year, the third period freshman science class students' behavior will improve as measured by observation checklists and discipline referrals.

The implementation strategy was comprised of three elements. First, the teacher/researcher (hereafter referred to as "researcher") contacted the parent of every student in the target class. The contact was to establish the parameters of the research. The purpose was explained to each parent and the method of communication was established

A choice of phone calls or a written form was given. In the intervention, every parent opted for the written format.

Second, the researcher developed a form on which the communication would take place. The form contained several stem statements to help open the lines of communication. There were four stem statements that were to initiate student communication and three stem statements to initiate parent communication. The student portion was a self evaluation as well as an opportunity to express any problems or indicate the need for extra help. Also, it gave students an opportunity to express progress or anything else that they would like their parents or the researcher to know. The parents' portion encouraged discussion with their students and reflected their involvement and awareness of their student's progress. There was a third portion on which the researcher wrote comments. (Appendix E)

Third, the researcher logged the return of the signed forms to record if in fact the communication had taken place. If not, the researcher phoned the parent to ensure that the parents were kept up to date on the progress of their student. The researcher then responded to comments made about problem areas or help needed. The researcher discussed problem areas individually with the students or adjusted lessons to accommodate needs expressed by students.

The researcher began the process one week before the intervention period. An explanation of the background and purpose of the project was given to the students as well as

each participant's role. The students were assured that their comments were not part of their grade and therefore should feel free to express any appropriate thoughts. A letter explaining the project was then handed out to be taken home. The students and their parents were encouraged to discuss their understanding of the project and then sign a tear-off portion on which the parents were to indicate the method by which they would like to be contacted.

Of the thirty three students assigned to the target class, only thirteen had returned the signed form within the first week. The researcher was able to contact another seven by phone during the second week. The rest of the students were either reassigned to another class or quit attending school altogether. By the end of the intervention, there were seventeen students still attending class.

The evaluation survey was given to half the class on Fridays of alternating weeks. The students were given class time to complete their portion of the evaluation form. The researcher added comments over the weekend and returned the forms to the students on Monday. The students then carried the forms home for their parents to complete their portion of the cycle.

The stem statements for the students were: 1) I have improved ..., 2) I need to improve ..., 3) I really need help with ..., 4) I would like my parents to know ... These stem statements were to encourage students to write about themselves in a positive manner as well as reflect on

things that needed improvement. Generally, students did not write in-depth responses. Most of the comments were short and many were responses such as "nothing" or "everything". Those students who wrote more meaningful responses were also those students who seemed to benefit most from the process. It also seemed that some of those students who wrote more were more likely to have them signed and returned sooner.

Parent stem statements were: 1) I have seen (student name) improve in ..., 2) I am concerned about ..., 3) (student name) and I have discussed ... Parent comments were in general even less meaningful than the students. There were, however, some parents who wrote comments indicating that there was discussion between themselves and their student. The researcher noted that the comments decreased both in number and quality as time passed. To the parents of students who did not return the forms, a phone call was made. In some cases the parents indicated that they had seen the form, but the student had not returned it. In other cases, the parents had not seen the form. In both cases, the researcher and the parents discussed the student's progress.

Presentation and Analysis of Project Results

Student achievement, defined as a percent of available points attained and number of missing assignments, was analyzed for the first quarter and compared to data from the second quarter. Results are summarized in tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

Percent of Possible Points Attained for First and Second Quarter by Third Period Freshman Science Students

Student #	First Quarter Percent	Second Quarter Percent
1	49.0	38.7
2	51.2	38.0
3	29.5	21.5
4	45.3	45.0
5	38.6	51.7
6	60.0	58.8
7	70.8	72.6
8	32.4	16.8
9	70.7	79.9
10	28.7	36.7
11	28.3	23.3
12	65.3	56.6
13	72.7	75.2
14	49.7	75.2
15	54.0	60.0
16	68.1	61.0
17	40.0	51.8
Average	50.3	50.8

Table 4

Percent of Assignments Not Turned In

Student #	First Quarter Percent	Second Quarter Percent
1	24.0	16.7
2	17.0	37.5
3	65.5	62.5
4	51.7	41.7
5	17.2	12.5
6	17.2	16.7
7	17.2	4.2
8	72.4	75.0
9	31.0	16.7
10	44.8	37.5
11	44.8	37.5
12	27.6	8.3
13	3.4	0
14	27.6	8.3
15	27.6	16.7
16	3.4	4.2
17	44.8	41.7
Average	31.6	24.3

Analysis of this data showed that as a class, the total point average increased five tenths of a percentage point. It also showed that overall, six students improved, seven dropped, and four remained the same (for this comparison, plus or minus three percent was considered to be the same). At the same time, analysis of the data for homework showed that, as a class, the average of missing assignments improved from 31.6 percent missing during the first quarter to 24.3 percent missing during the second quarter. On an individual basis the number of students who improved was 11, the number of students who dropped was one and the number of students who remained the same was five. When the two tables were compared to each other, it was noticed that while 65 percent of the students improved in turning in work, only 35 percent improved in total point percentage. At the same time 41 percent of the students decreased in total point percentage. A cursory view of the assignments showed that some of the missing assignments were either lab reports or tests which carried a much higher point value. Also, many more of the assignments seemed to be copied from other students. The researcher concluded that these assignments were indeed copied and without being read by the copier, as evidenced by the number of the same spelling, grammatical and informational mistakes.

Analysis indicated that overall grade point average for the class rose three tenths of a point. Further study revealed that four students improved their grade,

three students lowered their grade and ten students remained the same. The results of student grade comparison is shown in table 5.

Table 5

Comparison of First and Second Quarter Student Grades

Student #	First Quarter Grade/Value	Second Quarter Grade/Value
1	D / 1	F / 0
2	D / 1	F / 0
3	F / 0	F / 0
4	F / 0	F / 0
5	F / 0	D / 1
6	D / 1	D / 1
7	C / 2	C / 2
8	F / 0	F / 0
9	C / 2	B / 3
10	F / 0	F / 0
11	F / 0	F / 0
12	C / 2	C / 2
13	C / 2	B / 3
14	F / 0	B / 3
15	D / 1	D / 1
16	C / 2	C / 2
17	F / 0	D / 1
Average	.82	1.12

The researcher then reviewed the grades to determine the number of students who failed each quarter. It was found that, during the first quarter, eight of the students had failed the class. The second quarter data showed that seven students had failed. It was also noted that five students failed both quarters.

The second terminal objective was to improve the behavior of the students. The methods of assessment were the number of referrals and observation checklists. The number of referrals remained the same, at four, each

quarter, primarily for the same individuals. A review of observation checklists indicated that while behavior requiring removal from the class remained the same (much less than in other classes taught by the researcher), the smaller, disruptive behaviors increased slightly. This was attributed partly to the holiday season and partly to students who had given up hope or stopped caring becoming more disruptive.

Reflections and Conclusions

The project delivered mixed results. When compared to the terminal objectives, only a portion of one objective was achieved. The class did not raise its grade average by five tenths of a point, but did achieve a three tenths of a point increase. This was, however, largely due to one individual who rose three points.

The improvement in the assignments turned in was notable. The class reduced the number of missing assignments from 31.6 percent to 24.3 percent not turned in. Only one student, who improved on the assignments turned in, received a lower grade. This was due to lower test scores, for which, the student indicated, she did not study. Four of the students who improved on the assignments turned in raised their grade one or more levels.

In terms of class improvement, the intervention did not result in attaining the objectives stated. For some individuals, there was a relationship between the project and improvement.

The objective to improve behavior, achieved similar results. The class as a whole did not show improvement. However, there were some individuals who, as a result of increased parental awareness, did show improved behavior.

When analyzing both objectives for the class as a whole, the researcher observed that both students and parents made comments regarding behavior and improvements that were often not translated into action. In particular, parents who required a contact by phone failed to put into action the plan to which they agreed. Some indicated that they would follow up with their students in some manner such as enforcing a study period. In most cases, this never happened. By the end of the quarter, a study period was not established.

For those parents who responded quickly to the evaluation form and who indicated that there was, in fact, discussion with their student, the project had a positive value. However, it should be noted that most of those same parents had previously attended the school's open house or had called the school to establish contact on their own. Those parents did express a positive attitude about the project and the increased frequency of the communication.

In concluding, the evidence indicated that for the class as a whole, the intervention allowed parents to feel better about the school, but did not translate into class achievement, either academically or behaviorally.

Chapter 6

Decisions on the Future

The Solution Strategy

The data give mixed messages as to the value of continuing the effort of this intervention. Over all, the benefits do not seem worth the time and effort it would take to implement this on a full schedule of 150 students. However, on an individual basis, it could prove to be useful. If modified to be applied toward those families who are willing to enhance communication and then follow up with appropriate action, this program could provide benefits.

There were several families who used the increased communication to make changes in how they treated academic activities. Those families who treated the extra communication as a means to improve, made changes in their family life to help the student adjust and improve his or her study habits.

It is important that it be noted that the word "families" is applied here. As was stated in chapter three, the education process has three members - the teacher, the student **and** the parents. If real progress is to be made, then the parents must make accommodations as well as the student and the teacher. In some cases, that means a parent must make time to ensure the actions that were agreed upon are, in fact, taking place on a timely basis. An example

might be that a parent supervise a study period, or check on a student's comprehension of reading materiaI by asking a few questions about the material the student has just read. This does not require that the parent have intricate knowledge of the subject. The parent need only check to see if the student's response sounds as if he or she understands the material.

The teacher must also be willing to make adjustments according to the needs of the students. Special attention must be given in areas where the student has indicated that help is needed. Lessons must be altered to meet the needs of the students who are having difficulty. Since one of the areas on the evaluation sheet was for the student to express areas with which he or she needs help, then those areas should be addressed.

Finally, the student must be willing to fulfill the final part of the triangle. The student must be truthful in his or her self evaluation and at the same time, be willing to accept the advice of the teacher and parents. After an agreement has been reached concerning what actions need to be taken, then all parties must support it with action. When one or more of the legs of the triangle is not functioning on the same level, the process breaks down.

Additional Applications

For those families and teachers who are willing to make the proper commitment, this strategy could be applied in any class at the secondary level. The key to its success is the

willingness of all parties to take responsibility for their part of the education triangle. As was evidenced in this study, that is not an easy task. As Lamm (1986) pointed out, many parents are apathetic by the time their children are in secondary school, feeling that academic progress is based largely on innate ability. In some cases the parents might be willing, but have little influence over their student - because of work schedules, family relationships or something else.

Dissemination of Data and Recommendations

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the study indicated that on a total class basis, the intervention was not successful. There were, however, families who did benefit from the program and that should not be ignored. The problem then becomes how to discern which families would, in fact, benefit from such a program. It could be modified to include only those students who are at a "D" or "F" level. This evaluation format would seem to be much more informative than the daily or weekly sheets that some students now use. Those sheets simply provide information about attendance and overall behavior. However, many of these same students are those whose families would not become actively involved in any process. At the same time, those students who are at a "C" or higher level, but who need an extra boost to move to the next level would not receive the benefit of the extra communication.

Another modification that might be applied would be to alter the initial contact regarding the project. Of course, the first contact should be primarily a welcoming to the class affair. In this intervention, the initial contact with the parents was primarily informative, except for asking the parent to supply a preference as to the method of future communication. Perhaps it would be beneficial to make this first contact more contractual in nature, that is, to raise the level of awareness about commitment to action. This might help parents to feel compelled to follow through with strategies agreed upon. It might also help segregate out those who are not committed to supporting this program.

While I believe that every attempt should be made to include as many parents as possible, the amount of time required to successfully respond to 70 - 75 student evaluations each week in an informative manner would be overwhelming. Even though the time spent in the beginning would be considerable, I would recommend contacting the families and continuing the program on the basis of observed participation and benefits to the student, particularly for the freshman and perhaps sophomores. For those families who benefitted from the communication, the process could continue. For those families who did not benefit, time could be saved by eliminating them from the program or devising a school program to support the students who do not have parental backing.

By making an effort to include the parents of younger students from the beginning, it might be possible to head off problems before they become a habitual part of the students' behavior and expectations. It might also increase the parental involvement through out the student's secondary school career.

Another benefit of beginning the program early is that at the middle school, teachers work in teams and the work might be spread out. Perhaps by the time the students reach high school, the families will be familiar with the procedures and lessen the time required to make second contacts by reducing the number of first contacts not returned to the teacher.

At some point, I suppose that the parents could become weary of responding to each class separately. However, to make a combined form whereby all the teachers of one student would comment on one piece of paper, would be a logistical nightmare. If those parents think that seven forms is tiresome, then think of the teachers who might have as many as 150 forms to handle.

The success of the program with some students has indicated to this researcher that there is merit in the program. The limited amount of literature specific to this approach indicates that further research is called for. Through staff development meetings, I would encourage other instructors to make an effort at a similar program, perhaps with modifications such as the ones described earlier. Then

a comparison of effectiveness versus time spent could be obtained. This type of study, done at the immediate site, would be much more informative than the few studies that have been found in the literature up to this point.

The limited amount of published information on the actual effects of parent - school communication would seem to indicate that much more research is required. Even though there are many articles with titles about communication, the vast majority of them deal with primary and preschool students. At that, the majority of those are to improve the quantity and quality of contacts in order to ensure a timely flow of information.

This type of program requires more than staff development. it requires family development. The time necessary for instructors to fulfill their portion of the program will undoubtedly be difficult to sell. The key will be whether or not the families respond with enthusiasm and more importantly, action. Too many times too many teachers have heard the words, "What should I do to help my child?" only to find that their suggestions are not put into action. If parent and teacher can work together , then perhaps the students will see a benefit for joining in also, particularly if he or she gets the same idea from home and school: Even more so if improvement is seen and the student can feel better about him or herself.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Parent Survey

Dear Parent:

As part of the effort to improve education we are asking for some information to help us better communicate with you. Please answer this short questionaire and have your student return it to his/her first hour teacher by Friday, May 28, 1993. Thank you very much for your help.

Please check all answers that apply.

1. Has your school contacted you at some time during the year?
   Yes_____ No_____

   If yes, how:

   Phone: Administrator _____
   Teacher _____
   Counselor _____

   Form letter: Administrator _____
   Teacher _____
   Counselor _____

   Personal letter: Administrator _____
   Teacher _____
   Counselor _____

   Home visit by: Administrator _____
   Teacher _____
   Counselor _____
   Home School Counselor _____
   Other (Specify) _____

   Newsletter from: School _____
   Team _____

   Parent-Teacher Conference: Conference Day _____
   Other _____

2. Was contact for Academic Achievement? _____
   or Behavior? _____
   Was the contact Positive? _____
   or Negative? _____

3. Have you been satisfied with your contact with the school?
   Yes _____ No _____

4. Have the contacts been frequent enough?
   Yes _____ No _____

Over

5. When being contacted by the school, what method would you prefer?
   - Phone _____
   - Letter (Mailed) _____
   - Letter (Student carried) _____
   - Home Visit _____
   - Other (Specify) _____

6. Are you available during school hours (7:30 - 2:30) for phone or personal conferences? Yes _____ No _____

7. Do you have access to a phone during school hours where you can make or receive calls? Yes _____ No_____

8. Do you attend after school events?
   - PTO Meeting _____
   - Open House _____
   - Science Olympiad _____
   - Other (Specify) _____

9. Did you attend the Parent-Teacher Conference Day?
   Yes _____ No _____

10. Do you believe teachers should hold evening and/or weekend conferences to accommodate working parents?
    Yes _____ No _____

11. Do you believe teachers should be paid for after school hour conferences? Yes _____ No _____

12. Would you like an "assignment hotline" phone system initiated at your school? Yes _____ No _____

13. Would you be willing to contribute to such a system?
    Yes _____ No _____

14. Under what circumstances would you like to be contacted by the school?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix B
Parent Information Letter

Dear Parent:

I am working on a project to help students become more aware of how their actions and habits affect their academic performance. Each week half the students will evaluate themselves on a form provided by me. The form will also contain comments from me and there will be space for your input as well.

The goal of this project is to provide a forum for the three of us to look at how, working together, we can make the educational process a team effort instead of putting all the weight and responsibility on the shoulders of the student. I feel that by opening the lines of communication you will understand my goals for your student and you can let me and your student know what you expect.

The form you will receive every other week will have the start of a sentence. I am looking for positive statements as well as any concerns. Please feel free to complete the sentences in any way you see fit. The three of us will be the only ones who will see the responses.

It is important that you participate along with your student and me. The better we communicate the more we can accomplish. The student will be expected to carry this home every two weeks and return it within two or three days. Any further delay will limit the time we can help the student. I hope this form will provide the tool to improve communication, however if you feel a phone call would be more effective please indicate that below. If you have any questions send a note with your student or feel free to call me at school. The voice mail number at Guilford is 654-4868, my extension is 3126.

Sincerely,

Mr. Bruce Moe

- -

Tear off and return

Name of student _____
Please print

Parent/Guardian Name _____
Please print

I expect my student to carry
this information every two weeks. _____

I would prefer that you call me. Phone # _____

Best time to call _____

Parent Signature_____

Appendix C

Student Evaluation Form

The purpose of the "student evaluation" is to encourage students to relate their performance in the classroom with achieving their academic goals. Students and parents should discuss this form, keeping in mind, ways to improve or maintain performance. Please return to your teacher as soon as possible.

For the student:

1. I have improved

2. I need to improve

3. I really need help with

4. I would like my parents to know

For the parent:

1. I have seen _____ improve in
   Student Name

2. I am concerned about

3. _____ and I discussed
   Student Name

Teacher comments:

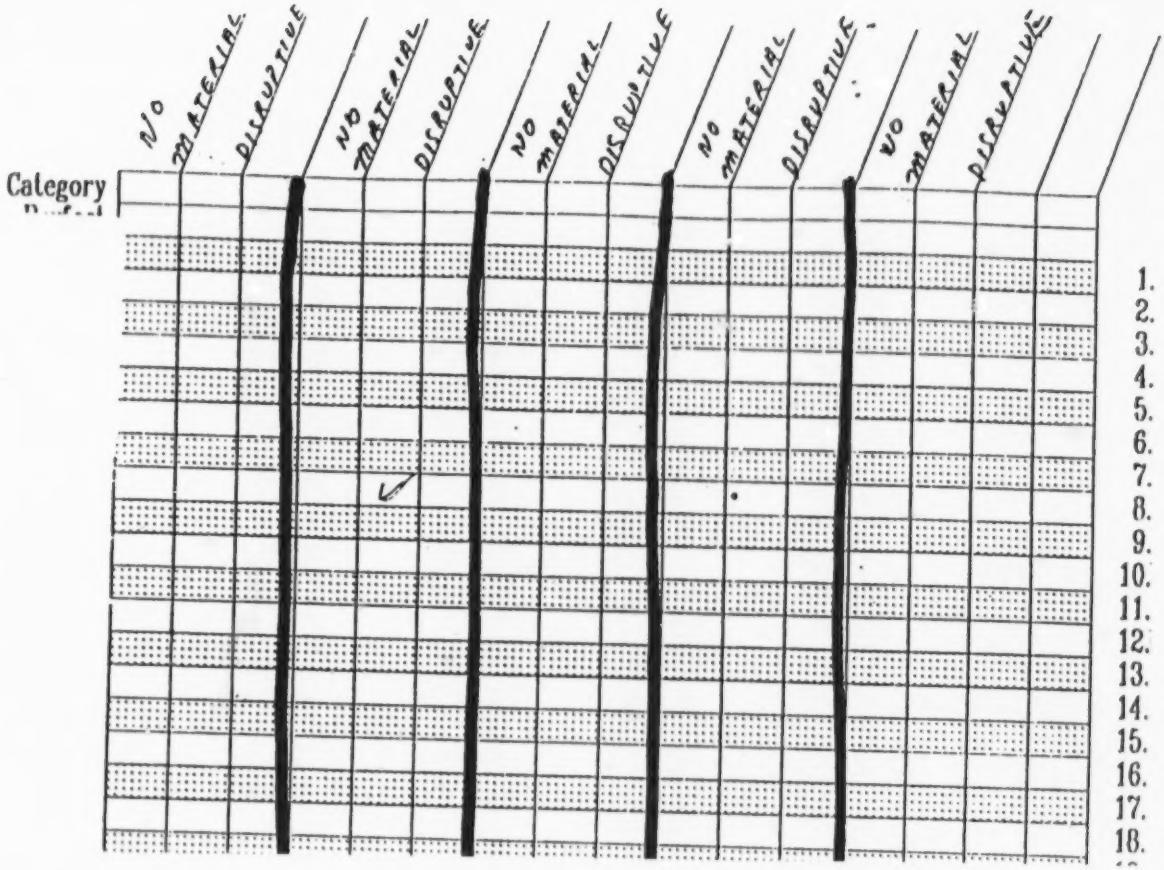
Signatures: Student _____ _____ Date_____

Parent _____ _____ Date_____

Teacher _____ Date_____

Appendix D

Observation Check List



Appendix E

Student Evaluation Form

The purpose of the "student evaluation" is to encourage students to relate their performance in the classroom with achieving their academic goals. Students and parents should discuss this form, keeping in mind, ways to improve or maintain performance.

For the student:
1. I have improved Behavior.

2. I need to improve on [illegible]

3. I really need help with
Studying for tests

4. I would like my parents to know I am [illegible]

For the parent:
1. I have seen [redacted] (Student Name) improve in his desire to do better, but it is not consistant.

2. I am concerned about his attitude and work he has not turned in. Please keep us informed.

3. [redacted] (Student Name) and I discussed his note taking and test preparation.

Teacher comments: [redacted] needs to be more consistent. So far this quarter he has all his work but 1 turned in. Work on taking notes so that you can read them.

Signatures: Student [redacted] Date 11-31-93

Parent [redacted] Date 11-29-93

Teacher [illegible] Date 11/29

BEST COPY AVAILABLE